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ABSTRACT

Presenting information on the Indian Education Act (IEA), this brief pamphlet includes: (1) statistics documenting the educational problems afflicting the American Indian (e.g., an average educational level of 8.4 years for all Indians); (2) the unique educational needs of the Indian (e.g., rural isolation, urban assimilation, termination of tribal governments, cultural differences, etc.); (3) accomplishments under IEA (e.g., national concern, communication links between parents and schools, improved attitudes toward education by parents and students, interagency interaction, etc.); (4) future objectives (create an educational system that will have a capacity for change, identify problems which are of local and national scope, and provide leadership for their solution); (5) recommendations (greater IEA information dissemination; program consolidation; early childhood programs; encouragement of pride in cultural heritage; provision for student clothing, school supplies, etc.; production of American Indian instructional materials; Indian run recreation, health, education, and on-the-job training programs; and national commitment to construction needs); (6) IEA priorities (Part A designed to meet the unique needs of Indian children in public and Indian controlled schools; Part B authorizes use of discretionary grants for work with Indian agencies on special projects; Part C helps Indian tribes, organizations, etc. plan, demonstrate, and operate educational programs). (JC)

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# THE INDIAN EDUCATION ACT

## Reformation in Progress

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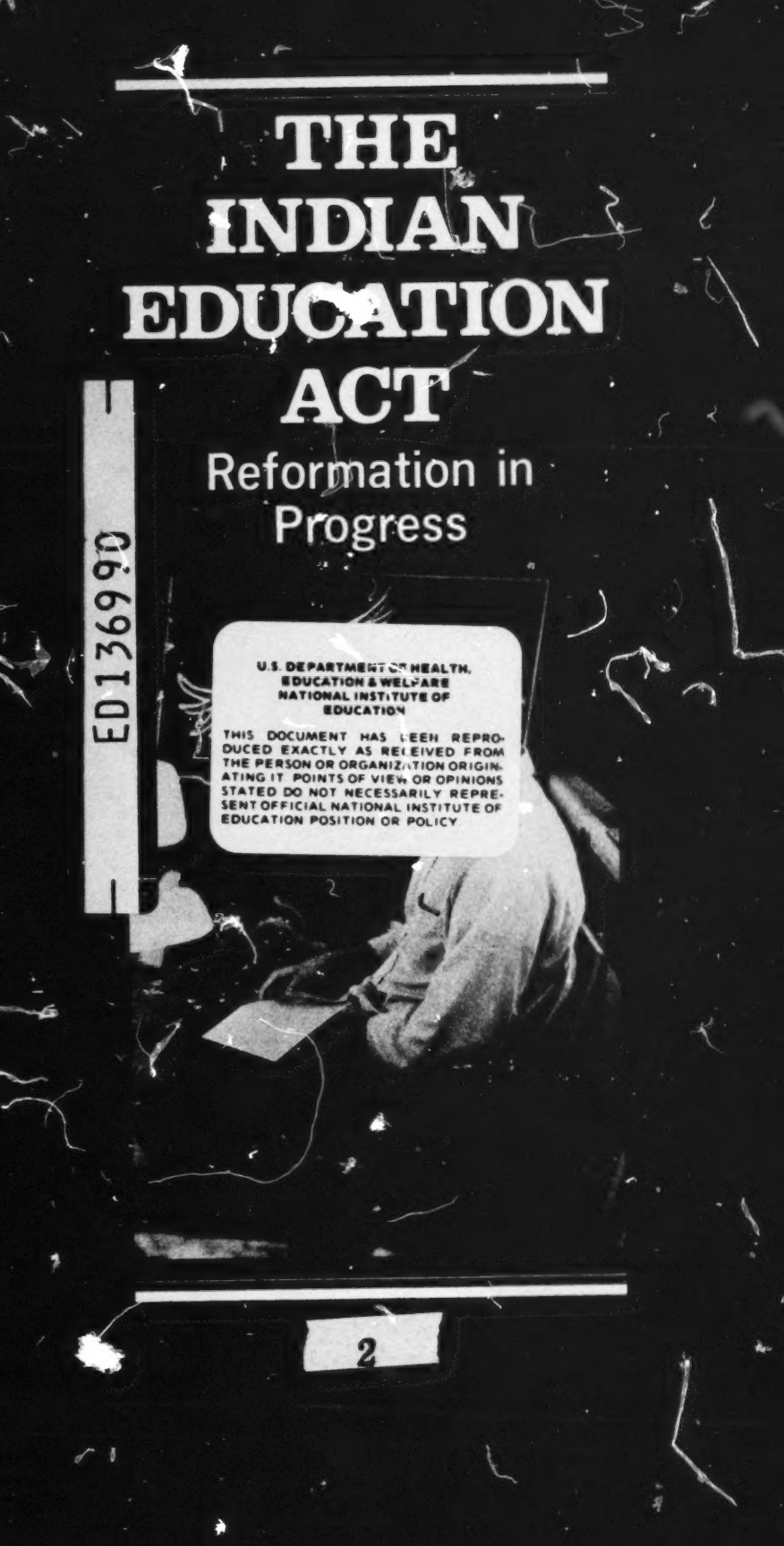

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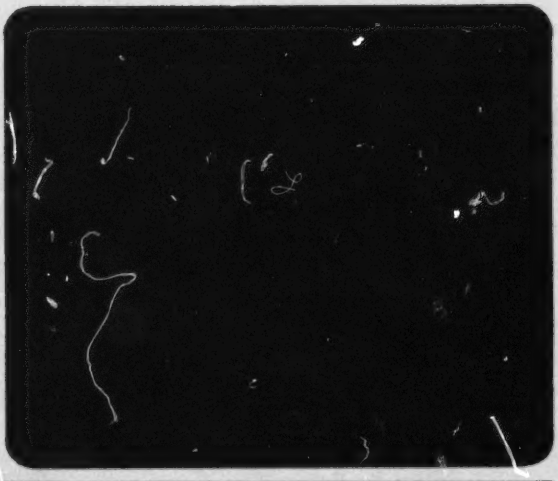

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## Reformation in Progress—
## The Indian Education Act

In June of 1972, the Indian Education Act was signed into law as Title IV, Public Law 92–318, Education Amendments of 1972, to meet the special needs of the first Americans. There was no clear concept of what those needs were—all that was really known was that there were many problems.

For example:

- The average educational level for all Indians was 8.4 years.
- In grades 8–12, the dropout rate was 39–48 percent.
- Studies showed that Indian students scored significantly lower in measures of achievement at every grade level than the average white pupil and that the degree of lag was greater at grade 12 than at grade one, indicating that the longer students stayed in school, the farther behind they fell.
- Statistics showed that 25 percent of all Indian children started school unable to speak English, demonstrating a vital need for bilingual education.
- A 1970 survey showed that 36 percent of parents of Indian children had not continued beyond high school and that parental participation in their children's educational process was minimal.
- In 40 percent of the cases surveyed, no teacher-parent interaction relative to pupil progress occurred, and nearly 70 percent of the parents had no contact with teachers regarding their child's behavior.

### Needs

Because of his heritage, the educational needs of the Indian student are unique and highly specialized. Rural isolation, urban assimilation, termination of tribal governments, cultural differences, and the desire to retain an Indian

identity are but a few of the factors which influence learning for the first Americans. All of these factors, coupled with the fact that Indians belong to a multicultural nation made up of many different tribes, have caused educational problems so diverse and complex that educators in the schools attended by Indians are barely beginning to learn how to cope with them.

Adequate coping calls for many things, starting with money enough to fund requisite programs and coordination among the various governments and agencies now responsible for administering them.

Currently, Indian education is the responsibility of Federal, State, and local government through the U.S. Office of Education, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, tribal governments, and schools run by various private organizations. Coordination of effort and resources is required to bring the level for educational opportunity for Indian children and adults up to that offered to other Americans.

Before this can be accomplished, the student's own culture must be made part of the learning process. Past failure to provide curriculums reflective of more than the "white man's" culture has produced two of the major problems encountered in efforts to bring Indians into the mainstream of modern American life. The first is lack of student interest, which has resulted in a heavy dropout rate among Indian students. The second is parental doubt of the value of modern education—a lack of faith which prompts many parents to ask: "Why should our children have to go to school when there is nothing there for *them*?"

It is a good question, and there is a good answer. For, regardless of cultural heritage, an educational basis must be developed upon which the skills essential to emotional, physical, and cultural well being may be built. At the same time, however, this process must never cease to reflect and support the student's unique cultural needs.

## Accomplishments

Sound foundations for such development have been laid under the Indian Education Act of 1972. These are some of the results:

- A national concern for the educational needs of Indians is beginning to become apparent. There has been a change of attitude and policy by government at all levels —from grudgingly meeting a burden to actively and positively meeting a responsibility.
- An awareness has been stimulated in local and State education agencies that they have Indian students and that there are problems that have to be dealt with.
- A positive communication link has been established between schools and the parents of Indian children, causing parental interest in the educational process and the educational progress of their children to resurface.
- A large number of jobs have been originated on and off the reservation, stimulating the local economy and creating a demand for more Indian professionals.
- Both student and parental attitudes toward schools and schooling have improved, resulting in better attendance and lower dropout rates.
- Through the interaction of Parent Committees, Federal and tribal governments, and education agencies, the way is being opened as never before for the development of sweeping new programs that will meet not only the educational but the overall welfare needs of Native Americans.

## Future Objectives

In today's technical world, learning should be an integrated part of community life, but this is unfortunately not the case even for the general society. The formal education process tends to be dominated by external forces and

interests and too far removed from the family and the pulse of the community. The impact of this situation has been devastating for Native Americans, who particularly need an education system which, while providing the best that modern schools and teaching expertise can offer, continues to maintain a meaningful role for the family in keeping with Indian cultural tradition.

The task of creating such a system is enormous. Working towards its achievement, the Office of Indian Education of the U.S. Office of Education plans to help education systems build a capacity for innovation and change; provide direct support for change; identify problems which are national as well as local in scope; provide leadership for their solution; and use that leadership to assure life-long equal access to the formal educational process for American Indians.

An impressive beginning has been made. Over the past two years, a series of conferences has been held in States throughout the country in which parents of American Indians, students, and educators met to make recommendations and plan *together* for the solution of problems in Indian education through programs made possible by funds available under the Indian Education Act.

The conferees agreed that the major stumbling blocks to bringing Indian education up to the general level of education in the country as a whole were the lack of sufficient control by Indians themselves over curriculum, teacher training, and budgets, and the fact that adequate school buildings and other facilities are not available in many communities.

## Recommendations

The delegates made many cogent recommendations. Among them were:

- Wider dissemination of information on the Indian Education Act, with examples from the projects for the improvement of Indian education which have been started since

the legislation was passed in 1972. Projects range from the writing of textbooks in tribal languages to providing students with sound-tape cassettes and recorder to help improve their use of the English langauge.

- Consolidation of the many existing and proposed programs administered by the U.S. Office of Education, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and various other sources to make the maximum use of all Federal and other funds available for Indian education.
- Development of early childhood programs to give children a firm foundation to build on when they enter school.
- Encouragement of students to take pride in their cultural customs and heritage.
- Provision of funds to parents to meet the cost of sending their children to school and pay for clothing, school supplies, and other items.
- Development of methods to improve school attendance and reduce the number of school dropouts.
- Production of instructional materials which reflect the culture of Indian students using them.
- Enlargement of opportunities for Indian communities to design and run their own programs of recreation, health, education, and on-the-job training.
- A national commitment to meet school construction needs of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and public schools which Indians attend.

## Priorities

Congressional intent in enacting the Indian Education Act was to give all Native American students equal educational opportunity. Legislative authority for working toward fulfillment of that goal was set out in Parts A, B, and C

of the Law. The following areas of precedence have been established:

**Part A,** designed to meet the unique needs of Indian children in the public as well as in the Indian controlled schools, will—

- Focus on necessary increases in the per-pupil rate of expenditure for Indians, currently less than a third of the average amount spent on white students.
- Develop structures to facilitate Indian involvement, authority, and responsibility in the planning and general operation of their schools.
- Support a more effective level of funding for curriculum improvements, teachers, teacher aides, and instructional materials in languages and other subjects required to help Native Americans maintain their cultural heritage and identity while learning to live successfully in the modern world.

**Part B,** authorizing use of discretionary grants for work with Indian tribes, organizations, and State and local education agencies on special projects, which will—

- Focus on such national needs and priorities as teacher training, parent committee technical assistance, parent-based early childhood programs, educational materials development, and the development of educational models in public, alternative, and BIA schools.
- Document, package, and disseminate these models and practices and provide the technical assistance it will take to establish them in a wide range of school systems.
- Design a campaign, using all media, to illustrate what the program is accomplishing and publicize outstanding projects and their promise for the Indian future.
- Award grants for special educational programs for teachers of Indian children and provide fellowships for Indian students in graduate and professional programs lead-

ing toward a professional or graduate degree in engineering, medicine, law, business, forestry, and other fields.

**Part C,** created to help Indian tribes, organizations, institutions, and State and local agencies plan, demonstrate, and operate programs for improving employment and educational opportunities for adult Indians, will make it possible to—

- Place high priorities on teaching to achieve literacy, increasing the number of General Equivalency Diploma graduates, and providing wider opportunity for job training.
- Pay special attention to the development of social supportive skills through the use of culturally-relevant materials and curriculums to promote a sense of self-pride based on Indian history and culture.
- Support a clear emphasis on the use of curriculums most needed by Indian communities, such as legal education, consumer education, vocational counseling, and community education.

## Conclusion

As the original inhabitants of this land, the Indian people have a special relationship with the U.S. Government, which has responsibility for, and a legal and moral commitment to, the protection of Indian owned natural resources.

Since the white man's arrival on this continent, too many of the first Americans have been compelled to live on low economic and educational levels.

But this long history of injustice, exploitation, and broken promises is changing. Thanks to the passage of the Indian Education Act and other recent legislation, the pace of change is undergoing a dramatic acceleration.

The degree of change, nevertheless, depends upon the young people, who must inherit from their elders the mantle of leadership, and with it responsibility for the preservation of Indian

culture and the development of a strong economic base for Indian society.

Congress was concerned with this fact when it passed the Indian Education Act, specifying that all projects funded under the legislation must be developed and conducted with the cooperation of tribes, parents, and students so that the Indian future in education can be determined in full conjunction with Indian desires and decisions.

The several thousand projects now under way are working to this end, but much remains to be done.

Indian Education Act programs and the programs of the BIA must be more closely coordinated with each other and with the activities of both the public schools and those schools that are Indian controlled. Adequate levels of funding and the flexible administrative integration of all these elements will be necessary if a truly effective and comprehensive program is ever to be developed for coping with the full spectrum—preschool to adult—of Indian education's needs.

More adequate provision must be made for early childhood programs that will prepare children for classroom learning and for post-secondary programs in undergraduate, graduate, and vocational education. More teachers and teacher aides must be trained for the special needs of Indian students and more schools built with classrooms equipped to meet those needs. And above all else, more parental concern over the weaknesses in Indian education, and more enthusiasm to overcome them, must be engendered if the quality of Indian education is to be brought up to the requirements of the 20th century.

This is a time of unprecedented opportunity for reform in Indian education if everyone concerned with it—leaders, teachers, parents, and students—will work together for all that it can mean to the Indian future.

**Further Information on The Indian Education Act May be Obtained From:**

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